

SUPREME COURT OF ARKANSAS

Garcia v. Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services

286 S.W.3d 674 (Ark. 2008) · No. No. 08-827 · Decided September 4, 2008

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Arkansas granted Ray Garcia’s motion to file a belated notice of appeal from an order terminating his parental rights. The court applied the standard from McDonald v. State, accepted counsel’s candid admission that her lack of diligence caused the late filing, and directed that the opinion be forwarded to the Committee on Professional Conduct.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Arkansas
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per Curiam
JURISDICTION	Arkansas
DECIDED	September 4, 2008
DOCKET	No. 08-827
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Garcia moved for permission to file a belated notice of appeal from an order terminating his parental rights.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Arkansas Supreme Court opinion
PARTIES	Ray Garcia v. Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services

TOPICS

- appellate procedure
- termination of parental rights
- parental rights
- family law procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- Appellate procedure
- Family law
- Parental rights

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

- Whether the Arkansas Supreme Court should grant a motion to file a belated notice of appeal when counsel admits fault for filing the notice one day late in a parental-rights termination case.
- Whether indigent parents appealing termination-of-parental-rights orders receive the same treatment under the McDonald standard that Arkansas affords indigent criminal defendants.

HOLDINGS

1. A motion for belated appeal may be granted when the attorney responsible for the untimely perfection of the appeal candidly admits fault, subject to the applicable time limit for seeking such relief.
2. The court applies to indigent parents appealing termination-of-parental-rights orders protections similar to those afforded indigent criminal defendants under the McDonald standard.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Where an appeal is not timely perfected, either the party or attorney filing the appeal is at fault, or there is good reason that the appeal was not timely perfected.” (286 S.W.3d at 675)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The circuit court entered an order terminating Garcia's parental rights. Garcia's notice of appeal was filed one day after the deadline established by Arkansas Supreme Court Rule 6-9(b)(2), and his attorney candidly admitted that her lack of diligence caused the late filing.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The circuit court entered its order terminating Garcia's parental rights on April 21, 2008. His notice of appeal was due May 5, 2008, but was filed May 6, 2008; counsel admitted that the untimeliness resulted from her lack of diligence, and the Arkansas Supreme Court granted the motion for a belated appeal.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- McDonald v. State, 356 Ark. 106, 146 S.W.3d 883 (2004)
- Smith v. Arkansas Department of Health & Human Services, 371 Ark. 425, 266 S.W.3d 694 (2007)

OPINION

Garcia v. ARK. DEP. OF HEALTH AND HUM. SER. 286 S.W.3d 674

PER CURIAM.

286 S.W.3d 674 (2008) Ray GARCIA, Appellant, v. ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, Appellee. No. 08-827. Supreme Court of Arkansas. September 4, 2008.

*675 Dee A. Scritchfield, for appellant.

No response. PER CURIAM. Appellant Ray Garcia, by and through his attorney, Dee A. Scritchfield, has filed a motion to file a belated notice of appeal. The circuit court's order terminating Garcia's parental rights was filed April 21, 2008. Pursuant to Arkansas Supreme Court Rule 6-9(b)(2) (2008), Garcia's notice of appeal was required to be filed no later than May 5, 2008,

but was not filed until the next day, May 6, 2008. Ms. Scritchfield states that, due to her lack of diligence, Garcia's notice of appeal was untimely filed. This court clarified its treatment of motions for rule on clerk and motions for belated appeals in *McDonald v. State*, 356 Ark. 106, 146 S.W.3d 883 (2004). There we said that there are only two possible reasons for an appeal not being timely perfected: either the party or attorney filing the appeal is at fault, or, there is "good reason." 356 Ark. at 116, 146 S.W.3d at 891. We explained: Where an appeal is not timely perfected, either the party or attorney filing the appeal is at fault, or there is good reason that the appeal was not timely perfected. The party or attorney filing the appeal is therefore faced with two options. First, where the party or attorney filing the appeal is at fault, fault should be admitted by affidavit filed with the motion or in the motion itself. There is no advantage in declining to admit fault where fault exists. Second, where the party or attorney believes that there is good reason the appeal was not perfected, the case for good reason can be made in the motion, and this court will decide whether good reason is present. *Id.*, 146 S.W.3d at 891 (footnote omitted). While this court no longer requires an affidavit admitting fault before we will consider the motion, an attorney should candidly admit fault where he has erred and is responsible for the failure to perfect the appeal. See *id.* While the instant case is not a criminal case, we have afforded indigent parents appealing from a termination of parental rights similar protections to those afforded indigent criminal defendants by applying the *McDonald* standard. See, e.g., *Smith v. Arkansas Dep't of Health & Human Servs.*, 371 Ark. 425, 266 S.W.3d 694 (2007) (granting a motion for belated appeal in a termination-of-parental-rights case). This court's rules further provide that no motion for belated appeal shall be entertained unless application has been made to this court within eighteen months of the date of the entry of judgment. See Ark. R.App. P.-Crim. 2(e) (2004). We note that Garcia's motion was filed well within the time period so prescribed. In accordance with *McDonald v. State*, *supra*, Ms. Scritchfield has candidly admitted fault. The motion is, therefore, granted. A copy of this opinion will be forwarded to the Committee on Professional Conduct. Motion granted.